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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, it's back to school for most, as well as back to work for summer vacationers - myself included. At least it's been a short week due to the Labor Day holiday! The weather this past week has been unseasonably cooler, but I'm certainly not complaining! I prefer these temperatures over the 80's and 90's that we had for most of the summer. While it's been somewhat overcast and damp, I can live with it. Still, it's difficult to believe that the summer is all but over already! We even closed the pool up this past weekend, doubtful that we'd use it again this year.

There's been a lot of news this week surrounding the arrests of a couple of the alleged virus/worm creators that have plagued the world's computers recently. After reading some brief information regarding these suspects, it doesn't appear that these suspects are the vile hackers that one would imagine, but copycats who managed to alter the worms somewhat and re-release them in our midst. Phrases like "good kids" and "never had a problem with the law before" really amuse me! Sure, they just never got caught before! They had to realize what the damage could be! "Harmless pranks" are only harmless when they don't hurt anyone or any thing. Whatever happened to really harmless pranks like phoning people and asking "Do you have Prince Albert in a can?" Oh yeah, I forgot - tobacco jokes aren't politically correct any longer!

Well, before I depress myself any more, let's wrap it up for this week. These short weeks make for a tighter deadline, so I'll get back to putting the finishing touches together for yet another issue.

Until next time...

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Nethack 3.4.2 Released

Nethack is a free overhead view Dungeons & Dragons-style adventure game.

It runs on several different platforms and has both graphical and text interfaces.

3.4.2 is a bugfix release for Nethack 3.4, fixing several fatal and piles of smaller bugs.

TOS/GEM binaries are available from the download page.

http://www.nethack.org/

AvP Author Launches Website

Andrew Whittaker, author of the award winning "Alien Vs Predator" for the Atari Jaguar and a string of hit games on the Atari ST has launched a website based upon his work.

There is still much more to add, but already today a major series of game tips for AvP went live online! with more information being added on a daily basis.

There is also a link to ask your game queries direct to Andrew by email.

http://andreww.atari-users.net/

SC68 2.0.0 (YM-2149 Emulation Library) Released

SC68 is a YM-2149 emulation library. Recently version 2.0.0 has been released. Additional packages include Winamp and XMMS plugins.

For more see: http://sashipa.ben.free.fr/sc68/

Colossal Computer Cartoon Book

The Colossal Computer Cartoon Book is now on the Web at AtariArchives.org.

Published in 1977 by Creative Computing, the Colossal Computer Cartoon Book includes more than 250 cartoons and comics about computers and technology. The cartoons in the book stand the test of time - despite being first published 26 years ago, they remain as funny and relevant as the day they were drawn.

http://www.atariarchives.org/cartoon/

This is the 20th classic computing book to be made available at AtariArchives.org.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I've got nothing really interesting to talk about this week... unless you want to talk about my migraine. Nah, I didn't think so. Hell, it's MINE, and _I_ don't want to talk about it.

If you've never had a migraine, count yourself lucky. I've tried to explain migraines to friends and family over the years, and never had much luck conveying anything but the most superficial explanation. Imagine someone hammering a red-hot railroad spike or knitting needle into the center of your head while flashing a strobe light in your eyes and blaring the most irritating, distorted sounds imaginable in your ears. Add to that a punch-drunk kind of consciousness, and an inability to discern color or gauge time and you've got a little bit of an idea of what an average migraine is like. It's hard to believe that I don't look forward to them, ain't it? <grin>

Anyway, I started with a migraine during dinner tonight. I can count on anywhere from 8 to about 30 hours before it lets up. No, I'm not looking for sympathy. I've dealt with migraines for almost 25 years now, and I've evolved my own way of dealing with them. With things like biofeedback and meditation the pain can be controlled to an extent, but don't let anyone fool you... telling yourself that there IS no pain just doesn't work. I've found that, for me, the key is to accept the situation and deal with the symptoms. Once I started accepting the symptoms and stopped trying to fight them, I found that I could cope with them with less trouble. There are times when a migraine comes on too quickly or too strongly to do anything but hide from any stimuli that "hurts", but for the most part I can cope for one major reason... I accept it.

There's probably a lesson in there somewhere, but damned if I can see it through the "neon amoeba" and tunnel vision.

Let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

>From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

'Gilian' asks for help with a lazy 520:

"My Atari 520 STfm did manage to boot on couple of occasions at first (the usual stuff, some "ticking" noise from empty internal floppy drive and green OS screen appears). But now, when I try to boot it up, the only thing I hear is the same usual "ticking" noise from the floppy drive which goes on forever (was waiting for over 30mins) but nothing happens, no green screen, no cherry bombs, nothing. I did try to boot up with floppy drive disconnected, didn't make any difference. Just was wondering what was going on, didn't have any luck in FAQ, so you guys is my last hope ;)

Moreover, when I did manage to boot up at first I was trying to format DD disk (3 to be precise) but failed every single time at around 80% format, OS was saying that there is some disk error. Not sure whether it is related to the above problem in any way.

My gear: Atari 520 STfm (internal floppy + modulator)
No internal Hard Drive and no other external/internal mods.
Just plain 520 STfm."

Steve Sweet tells Gilian:

"The quickest way to boot an ST is with a blank formatted diskette in the drive but it seems you have other problems."

Tom McEwan adds:

"The eternal disk check on bootup sounds a lot like loose ROM chips to me. You can open up the case and straighten them out, maybe clean the contacts with some methylated spirit, or you could just try the controversial "Universal 10.16cm (4 inch) Drop". On a stock Atari, everyone swears it can do no harm, but given I've made some structural mods to mine (replacing the FD mount pillars to fit a larger drive, to be exact, cos some moron had glued the disk eject button in on the old one), so I haven't risked trying it on my machine.

As for the format problems, I'm not sure what could be wrong. First thing, make sure you're using genuine low density disks (they don't have the extra hole on the opposite side to the write protect tab). Atari's generally don't like HD disks. Next, make sure the drive itself is connected and working properly (you can take it out of the atari and test it by plugging it into a PC, though I have a feeling you need to turn the cable upside down or something strange like that) Other than that, I can't think of much else."

Gilian takes Tom's advice and then replies:

"it helped! ROM chips did become loose, so pushing them down did do the trick. After I've solved this problem, formatting problem has gone away, nice. What do you need to do, for RAM chips not to get loose again?

It looks like you know what you're talking about (with all your mods, etc). Where can I get new roms (with new OS, I've got 1.2) at reasonable price (i'm in the UK)?

Thanks again for all your help, much appreciated!"

Barrie at Keychange tells Gilian:

"Unless you specifically need the later TOS 1.04 roms the 1.02 will do most of what you need. Changing will be waste of money unless e.g. you want to use a hard drive."

Stephen Moss adds:

"The main advantages of TOS 1.04 over 1.02 is Control+Alt+Delete keyboard reset and DOS compatible disk formatting, although the latter is only of importance in doing PC to ST file transfers and even then you can format the disk on a PC.

TOS 1.04 in the last TOS version that can be fitted directly to ST's,

if you want a higher version than that you will have to install an upgrade board. IIRC these usually involve an external switch that allows you to select either the original TOS version or TOS 2.06 as necessary because some software may not function with one of the TOS versions.

Although hard drive communication my prove slightly faster I'm not sure you would notice the difference between using a hard drive with TOS 1.04 and TOS 1.02."

Paul Babb asks about emulators:

"I am searching an easy to use emulator which enables me to play the famous Oxyd or Bolo game under Win2000. Currently there is a DOS resp. Win95-Dos-Box Version of Oxyd but it doesn't run under Win2000 (or WinXP). Does anyone know how to let Oxyd most conveniently run under Win2000 with which emulator ?"

Matthias Arndt tells Paul:

"STEEM should fit for that purpose. Check http://steem.atari.org/ for details."

Al Ferrier asks about connecting with STiNG:

"As an online Atarian, I am keen to access my mail etc from either my STE 1040 or my PC and have been able to do so until recently via a pay-as-you-go account I had with Freeserve (my Atari was unable to access my usual paid-up WH Smith account). However, I think Freeserve have called time on that PAYG service as the number no longer connects.

Is there a dial script available for STinG for Tesco.net, my new ISP? Is there any site where I can download a template one so I can add my details? I seem to remember one for an early provider of mine, Zetnet."

Derryck Croker tells Al:

"A fellow club member reported that he wasn't able to connect to Freeserve with STiNG any longer - they claimed though that nothing had changed in their login.

Don't get hung up about scripts. Try the default cfg file with your details added but don't bother adding anything into the dial.scr section. It's been a while since I've done this, but there's usually no need to enter anything in that section unless you really have to and the way to find out what to add is to log in using a terminal prog and make notes on what it's asking and what you have to respond with."

David Wade adds:

"The freeserve web page still lists anytime as being available. I am sure there used to be two numbers but they now only list 0845 079 6699 as the number. Also has your account expired?

If you don't use it for 90 days you need to do "Retrieve account" from the

freeserve home page. (top left, internet access panel)"

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station... and maybe I’ll have recovered from my migraine... and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Luring Video Gamers Online!
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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Sony, Microsoft Look To Lure Video Game Players Online

Are you ready for some online football?

Sony Corp. and Microsoft Corp. hope so. The two video game console rivals are counting on thousands of armchair quarterbacks to kick their fledgling online services into gear this fall.

Though online gaming brings in little revenue for the companies today, they hope that changes soon - as soon as this month, in Microsoft’s case.

Sony’s PlayStation 2 online service and Microsoft’s Xbox Live service went live last year, with the free services led by military games. Now mainstream sports games, especially football, are taking the spotlight.

Electronic Arts Inc.’s "Madden NFL 2004," the leading sports game, is available for offline users of all the main console platforms. But it saw a surge of players taking the game online when it debuted the online version Aug. 12. For now, the online version can be played online only using Sony’s PlayStation 2 machine.

Meanwhile, Sony released its own online-enabled football game, "NFL GameDay 2004," from its in-house developer 989 Sports on Aug. 26. And Microsoft released its "NFL Fever 2004" for Xbox Live on Thursday, as part of its new XSN Sports lineup.

Sony, Microsoft and EA want to sell lots of regular, offline football game software this season. But they’re also scrimmaging for the lead in the

fledgling online game field.

"Online gaming is going to be quite big," said David Cole, president of researcher DFC Intelligence. "It’s going to be where it’s at five years down the road."

The number of online users is relatively small. Sony has about 800,000 online console gamers and Microsoft more than 500,000. But the numbers are expected to rise steadily.

Online will play a bigger role with the next-generation consoles from Sony and Microsoft, due out in 2005 or 2006, Cole says.

The video game business generated about $27 billion in sales of hardware and software worldwide last year, according to Wedbush Morgan Securities. Of that figure, nearly a third, or $8.6 billion, was from consoles and other hardware. Sales of video game software totaled $6.9 billion in the U.S. alone last year, says the Entertainment Software Association.

Industry officials believe the market will expand as game play moves from the living room into cyberspace. Instead of playing by themselves or with buddies who drop by their homes, online gamers can challenge friends and strangers worldwide.

Sports games appeal to mainstream players, and they’re the industry’s target now that the hard-core gamers are already online.

"Sports gaming probably has the highest percentage of online interest of any of the genres right now," said Jack Tretton, executive vice president of Sony Computer Entertainment America. In particular, EA’s "Madden NFL 2004" has been a "juggernaut" that’s helping to drive PlayStation 2 users online, he says.

EA has been "pleasantly surprised" by the interest in online console gaming, says EA spokesman Jeff Brown. "We underestimated the intense enthusiasm shown by hard-core gamers - that crucial group of people who buy 10 to 15 games per year," he said.

But he says EA doesn’t think online console gaming will be a serious business until PlayStation 3 comes out in a couple of years. For now, it falls short of a true mass-market audience, Brown says.

While Sony and EA don’t charge extra for their online gaming services today, users have to buy a $40 network adapter and an online-enabled game. And Microsoft charges $50 for an Xbox Live Starter Kit, which includes a headset and microphone and a year’s worth of service.

But Microsoft takes the big step this month. That’s when initial Xbox Live users will have to pay either $49.99 a year or $5.99 a month to renew what had been a free subscription.

Microsoft believes the fees are low enough to keep the great majority of users, says Peter Moore, corporate vice president of retail sales and marketing for Microsoft’s Home and Entertainment Division.

"We’re talking Big Mac and fries here," Moore said about the monthly cost.

Analysts expect Sony and its game publisher partners to start charging for online service once PlayStation 3 comes out. Sony now considers the online aspect just another feature of its games, which generally cost $40 to $50.

Microsoft sees online console gaming as a way to leapfrog market leader Sony. In North America, Sony has sold 20 million PlayStation 2 consoles to Microsoft's 6.2 million Xbox consoles.

Sony beat Microsoft to market with its new console by more than a year. PlayStation 2 debuted in the U.S. in October 2000. Xbox followed in November 2001.

But Microsoft's Xbox has several built-in functions for online gaming that Sony's PlayStation 2 doesn't have. Xbox comes with an ethernet port for broadband-only online gaming.

Sony sells a network adapter that lets PlayStation 2 owners play games online using dial-up or high-speed broadband links.

Next year Sony will sell a hard disk drive for storing downloadable game content, but Xbox already includes that.

In recent weeks, Sony, Microsoft and EA each have launched Web sites where sports gamers can track their scores and rankings, challenge other players, and create leagues and tournaments.

"This is the year that sports (gaming online) hits it big," said Kevin Browne, studio manager for Microsoft's Xbox sports games.

The online element is turning sports gaming from a mostly solitary activity into a social activity, he says.

The growth of online console gaming has been "a big wake-up call for Sony," says IDC analyst Schelley Olhava. Sony lost ground to Microsoft among hard-core gamers by not pursuing online capabilities as aggressively as Microsoft, she says.

"The perception is that Microsoft is a bit ahead of Sony" in online gaming, Olhava said. "Sony is working hard to catch up."

Video games are a huge profit maker for Sony, a media and electronics company.

For Microsoft, video games present an opportunity to expand beyond its strength in personal computers into consumer electronics.

Both companies see their game devices as future systems for delivering entertainment and other digital content to living rooms.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Online Sellers, Security Companies Target Web ID Theft

Internet retailers and security companies have formed a group to battle online identity theft, the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA) said on Tuesday.

The group, called the Coalition on Online Identity Theft, includes such founding members as Web retailer Amazon.com Inc., online auctioneer eBay Inc., software giant Microsoft Corp., security software company VeriSign Inc., and credit card provider Visa U.S.A. ITAA is the administrator for the coalition, which is not part of the technology trade group, an ITAA spokesman said.

The coalition will focus on four main goals: expanding public education campaigns; promoting technology and tips for preventing and dealing with online theft; documenting and sharing nonpersonal information about emerging online fraudulent activity to prevent future scams; and working with the government to ensure effective enforcement of criminal penalties against cyber thieves.

During 2002, just over 75,000 complaints were posted on the Internet Fraud Complaint Center (IFCC) Web site.

The IFCC, a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National White Collar Crime Center, said it referred more than 48,000 of those complaints of fraud and that the total dollar loss from those cases was $54 million, up from $17 million in 2001.

Second Suspect Arrested for Internet Virus

Police in Romania on Wednesday arrested a 24-year-old former student in connection with a computer-crippling Internet worm, according to a computer security company that aided police.

The company, Bucharest-based BitDefender, identified the student as Dan Dumitru Ciobanu, a 24-year-old graduate of the Technical University of Iasi, in northeastern Romania.

Police detained Ciobanu in connection with a modified and milder version of the Blaster worm, said Patrick Vicol, a virus analyst at BitDefender. Dubbed MsBlast.F, it was unleashed on computers of the Technical University, Vicol said.

Last week, Minneapolis high school senior Jeffrey Parson, 18, was charged with letting loose a different variation of the Blaster worm.

Authorities said Parson admitted during an interview with FBI and Secret Service agents that he tinkered with the original "Blaster" infection that made computers attack the Microsoft Web site last month. Prosecutors said Parson’s worm affected at least 7,000 computers.

In Romania, Vicol said BitDefender had responded to a police request to track down the author of MsBlast.F.

Company analysts traced Ciobanu through some Romanian-language text inside the virus that eventually led them to a Web page containing Ciobanu’s home address and telephone number, Vicol said.

"We tracked him using the bulletin boards. He actually gave his name - not a very smart thing to do," Vicol said in a telephone interview.

The Romanian-language message in the virus "says something not very polite about a teacher" at Ciobanu's former university, Vicol said.

Vicol stressed that both Ciobanu and Parson are suspected of merely modifying the text of the original Blaster, not of authoring the virus that snarled computer networks worldwide beginning Aug. 11 by exploiting a flaw in Microsoft Corp.'s Windows operating systems.

Unlike the original Blaster that experts say infected at least half a million computers, Vicol said he doubted the "F" version had spread beyond Romania.

Police seized computers from Ciobanu's home and workplace - at a photo developing lab - that BitDefender will analyze for evidence of the worm, Vicol said.

Ciobanu could face up to 15 years in prison under a new law in Romania, according to BitDefender's Web site.

Parson faces one count of intentionally causing damage to a protected computer. Conviction could bring a maximum 10 years in prison and a $250,000 fine.

Repent Downloaders and Get Amnesty

Internet users who promise to stop illegally copying music will be able to avoid prosecution under an amnesty program to be unveiled by the recording industry next week, a source close to the matter said Friday.

Users would sign a notarized affidavit promising to stop using "peer to peer" programs like Kazaa to download copyrighted music for free and to delete all songs they may have acquired illegally, said the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Recording Industry Association of America is expected to file lawsuits early next week against hundreds of peer-to-peer users suspected of engaging in widespread copyright violations.

Those facing lawsuits would not be eligible for the amnesty program, the source said.

An RIAA spokesman declined to comment.

The amnesty program is one of several recent moves by the industry to reach out to digital-music users and soften the impact of an aggressive legal fight that has incurred the wrath of many music fans.

Earlier this week, Universal Music Group announced that it would slash the retail cost of its CDs by 30 percent, and analysts expect other labels to follow suit.

Industry-authorized download services have been gaining in popularity as they offer improved features, and some such as buymusic.com have been negotiating discount packages with colleges and universities.

Copyright expert Gigi Sohn, who has frequently clashed with the industry in the past, said the amnesty program sounds like a good idea, but participants should not be forced to renounce all forms of song copying.

"This is a heck of a lot better than just going out and suing the daylights out of people," said Sohn, president of the Washington-based advocacy group Public Knowledge. "My concern is that people may give up rights they may have, such as the right to limited sharing."

Internet users who continue to copy music online after signing the affidavit could face possible criminal charges for willful copyright infringement. It was not clear what information participants would have to provide to the RIAA, or how they could obtain the form.

In addition to Universal, a division of Vivendi Universal, RIAA members include AOL Time Warner Inc.'s Warner Music; Sony Corp.'s Sony Music; Bertelsmann AG; and EMI Group Plc.

Symantec Raises Subscription Rates

Symantec quietly increased subscription renewal rates for its entire line of security products last week, citing the rising cost of fighting viruses and other malicious code worldwide.

The company is upping subscription renewal rates by $5 on all of its products. That means users of the company's popular $50 Norton AntiVirus software will pay $19.95 for each additional year they download virus definitions.

While previous rate increases have drawn the ire of users, Symantec executives say they are confident customers will understand why they're increasing prices. The hike comes just days after the company announced it would include piracy-fighting product activation technology in all of its 2004 consumer products.

Symantec has employees on duty around the clock watching for the next virus to appear, and that costs money, says Del Smith, a product manager for the company.

"We have research centers in North America, Asia, Australia, and Europe," he says. "As soon as they see a new threat they begin delivering new protections."

And the volume of threats is ever increasing, he says. For example, in August 2002 Symantec received 90,000 files from Norton AntiVirus owners running the software's Scan and Deliver service, which sends suspected viruses to the company for analysis. Just one year later, in August 2003, the number of suspect files will top 130,000. Symantec's software currently protects users from more than 60,000 known viruses, Smith says.

Detecting new viruses is only the first step. When the company identifies a new virus or worm, staffers quickly begin developing a new definition file so that Norton AntiVirus software can detect the threat. Owners of the software download the new definitions via the subscription service.

The company's other security products, including utilities and firewall

products, also require frequent updates, Smith says. Symantec staffers are constantly beefing up their products with everything from new URLs for Internet Security's Parental Control features to new updates for various firewall packages.

Over the years the company has also made significant investments to improve the way it creates these updates and then gets them to customers, he says. Today, most Symantec products automatically download and install these updates behind the scenes, without bothering the customer at all.

"To fund these services, and to allow us to continue to invest, we're raising prices," Smith says. The price increase impacts buyers in all countries except India, Japan, China, Taiwan, and Korea.

All of Symantec's products include an initial subscription. If you buy the product at retail or online, a year's subscription is included. Versions that ship on a new PC or other hardware usually include a three-month subscription.

While each program will continue to operate after the subscription period ends, it won't work as well without the latest updates. "It's important for users to keep up those subscriptions because it protects them against the latest threats," Smith says.

The cost of renewing the subscription for Norton AntiVirus standard moves from $14.95 to $19.95. The Pro version includes two licenses, so its renewal fee jumps to $39.90. Renewal fees for Norton SystemWorks (regular and Pro) jump from $14.95 to $19.95; Internet Security (regular and Pro) fees increase from $24.95 to $29.95; and Norton Personal Firewall goes from $9.95 to $14.95.

This is the third subscription price increase in as many years for some Symantec products. In November 2001 the company upped the fee for Norton AntiVirus from $3.95 to $9.95 (and vocal PC World readers complained). In Sept 2002 it increased the price again, to $14.95.

Those increases may sound exorbitant, but the threat has also increased exponentially, says Rob Enderele, principal analyst with the Enderle Group. In the end, most people will grumble but pay, because it costs more to move to a competing product, he says. For example, Symantec competitor Network Associates' newly released McAfee VirusScan 8.0 sells for $60. (A company spokesperson notes, however, that there are no immediate plans to raise VirusScan's $14.95-per-year subscription rates.)

Antivirus software and subscription renewals can be pricey, but most users now understand it can cost even more to go without it, Enderle says. Losing your hard drive to a virus will cost you considerably more than $20, he adds.

Symantec isn't likely to lose many customers over the price increase, but combined with the decision to include product activation on all of its 2004 products, the company risks aggravating it customers one time too many.

"Now that Microsoft is moving into antivirus, this process of continuing to aggravate the customer may come back to haunt this company," he says. Microsoft announced in June plans to offer antivirus protection in future products. Most likely this will be included in future versions of Windows, such as Longhorn, due in 2005, he says. Users irritated by Symantec's pricing and product activation decisions may decide Microsoft's protection is good enough.

Symantec executives aren’t worried, however. "We believe our pricing is competitive with what others are offering, and we also believe that the technology we provide offers the best protection in the market today," Smith says.

Microsoft Issues Warning Over New Software Flaw

Microsoft Corp. warned on Wednesday that users of its Office software were at risk of having their computers taken over by an attacker unless they applied a patch to correct the problem.

The world’s largest software maker said a "critical" flaw in its Visual Basic for Applications software, used to develop applications for Windows and Office, could enable a malicious programmer to create documents that would launch attacks on unsuspecting users.

Microsoft has vowed to improve security and reliability of its software, which has been hit by several high-profile flaws this year. The Slammer worm nearly brought the Internet to a halt in January while the Blaster worm and its variants crippled hundreds of thousands of computers in August.

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft urged users in a security bulletin (http://www.microsoft.com/security/) to apply the software fix.

At risk were recent versions of Microsoft’s Access, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, Visio, Word and Works applications, which are part of the Office family of software used in a range of tasks such as creating databases, documents, spreadsheets and presentations as well was publishing documents and Web pages. Some applications from Microsoft’s Great Plains business software division were also affected, Microsoft
said.

A user could trigger an attack by opening a document for any of those programs that contain Visual Basic components, the company said.

Microsoft credited eEye Digital Security, a security software provider in Aliso Viejo, California, for reporting the flaw.

Internet E-Mail Worm Targets Tony Blair

A new Internet worm has surfaced that criticizes British Prime Minister Tony Blair and launches an attack attempting to knock a U.K. government Web site off the Internet, anti-virus software provider Sophos Plc said on Thursday.

The worm, dubbed "Quaters," spreads via e-mail using a variety of subject lines, such as "Your Account Information," and spreads in Internet chat relay systems posing as an attempt to break an Internet chain mail world record.

It overwrites files on a user’s computer and displays a message that accuses Blair of wasting taxpayer money on immigrants instead of spending

it on the national health service and schools.

"Think about it Mr. Blair. Your career depends on it, we've had enough," the message says in part.

Quaters also tries to launch a denial-of-service attack on the Web site of the prime minister's office, http:/www.number-10.gov.uk, Sophos said.

There have been few reports of the worm circulating on the Internet, British-based Sophos said.

The malicious program is not the first to target a British prime minister.

In the 1990s, the Fu Manchu virus replaced the name of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher with an expletive whenever it was typed, said Chris Belthoff, a senior security analyst at Sophos.

Better Searching Through Dogpile

While the Web's two biggest search engines were busy debating who has the biggest index last week, a "meta" search service called Dogpile quietly launched a revamped Web site that makes it easier to search all the top engines at once.

Dogpile (www.dogpile.com), owned by InfoSpace Inc., is the only meta-search service to sign business deals with all the top search sites, allowing it to combine their results and sort them with the service's own relevancy algorithms to weed out duplicates and elevate the most promising ones.

"What we do, in effect, is bring you page one from every search engine," said Leslie Grandy, vice president of the search and directory business for InfoSpace.

Dogpile ranks results from many search services - including Google, Overture, Yahoo, AltaVista, Teoma, Ask Jeeves and About - using a formula that analyzes, among other things, the popularity of each engine, the number of click-throughs a site receives on Dogpile, how many other engines a site is listed in and its various rankings.

Searchers can also choose to sort results by search engine, which will present Google results first, then listings from the commercial service Overture, then the others.

You can also click on the "yellow pages" or "white pages" tabs to perform directory searches on your query. Dogpile's limited shopping feature defaults to offering only a version of the PriceGrabber.com comparison-shopping tool, but Grandy said Dogpile eventually will expand it.

In its previous version, Dogpile didn't differentiate well between advertising and regular results. Now paid results are tagged with a "sponsored" label, although they're still mingled in with regular results and sorted by various relevancy factors.

The search industry has been consolidating over the past year, with two companies now leading the pack: Google and Overture, which Yahoo has announced it is buying. Overture last week said that its search service

Alltheweb had indexed roughly 3.2 billion Web pages. Google has long touted its index as having more than 2 billion pages, but it updated the fine print at the bottom of its home page last week to say, "Searching 3,307,998,701 web pages."

First Look at Eudora 6.0

If you're shopping for an e-mail client, you might want to consider an old friend: Eudora is releasing version 6.0, its first significant upgrade in almost three years.

The newest version of the longstanding e-mail program provides new tools to help you stop the onslaught of spam, deal with long e-mail threads, and in general get organized.

Eudora 6.0 is available in three versions: The full version costs $50 per year ($40 as an upgrade from earlier versions); a sponsored version is free but includes ads; and a light version, also free, doesn't contain ads, but offers fewer features. For example, it lacks an automatic spelling checker. The full version also includes tech support and free upgrades within 12 months.

"With this launch, we're hoping to put the flag back in the mountain," says Bill Ganon, vice president of the Eudora products group at Qualcomm, of the long-awaited refresh.

Key among the new features is Eudora's SpamWatch tool, which is available only to users of the paid version. It was added based on user feedback, Ganon says.

"SpamWatch presents a fairly automatic and efficient way to handle spam at the client level for users without an IT department behind them," he says.

For users with an IT department - or an ISP with spam-blocking tools - SpamWatch provides an additional layer of protection against unsolicited e-mail. It incorporates a Bayesian plug-in that searches messages for spam-related words or phrases, and a Header plug-in that reads headers inserted by any other spam-fighting programs in use. SpamWatch scores each message based on the likelihood that it is spam.

Mail with high scores is delivered directly to your junk mail folder, where it self-deletes after 30 days. The default threshold for junk mail is 50, but you can adjust the score for your needs. In my tests, SpamWatch's default settings sent all of the unwanted messages to the junk mail folder, but it also banished a few newsletters and some automated e-mail. Setting the score slightly higher worked well, although SpamWatch did let a few stray unwanted messages slip into my in-box.

Also new in Eudora 6.0 is the Content Concentrator, a feature designed to transform long e-mail threads into manageable messages. It works as a sort of visual aid, stripping out redundant text in the preview pane.

For example, if three coworkers reply in succession to my long message, Content Concentrator removes the repeated text, such as signatures, the distribution list, and my original message. This way, I can glance at the preview pane and see their replies quickly. To view the entire content of a message, I simply open it to full view (this is the default setting - you

can also apply Content Concentrator to open messages, not just those in the preview pane).

Another new feature is Format Painter, which lets you copy styles and formatting from one place to another. The new Contextual Filing feature enables you to file messages into designated mailboxes by selecting a particular keyword. Also, Eudora's user interface is entirely redesigned.

The revised look is one of the update's few drawbacks: I found it somewhat cluttered, especially when I was testing the ad-supported version, even though it had only a few small ads. The icons are large and bright, but their purposes are not apparent at first glance.

Also in need of improvement: The program forces you, when replying to a message, to you adjust the formatting. If you neglect to do so, Eudora leaves no space between your text and the message you're answering when you start typing. It may sound minor, but the extra step took some getting used to.

Nevertheless, Eudora remains as easy to use as any other e-mail application, and it lives up to its good reputation.

"We want to reinforce to users that Eudora is established and our products are in development," says Qualcomm's Ganon. Especially with such timely features as its spam management, Eudora continues to be a player worth a look.

Glitch Shuts Down Lycos E-Mail

Users of the Lycos Web portal have been unable to access their e-mail this week following a glitch during an upgrade. The system was expected to remain frozen until at least Friday, the company said.

The problem began Tuesday when the company was applying new software to its database servers to improve back-up procedures, Lycos spokesman Brian Payea said.

"In the process of applying that new software we ran into a problem," Payea said. "Right now we are rebuilding those databases."

Payea stressed that no messages sent before or after the event have been lost, but said they cannot be accessed by users until the problem is resolved.

"When those databases have been rebuilt, we estimate (Friday) afternoon, people will be able to log in and get all of the e-mail that has been stored," Payea said.

Payea declined to say how many Lycos e-mail addresses there are, but comScore Media Metrix figures show Lycos as the seventh-most visited e-mail Web site, with just over 1 million unique visitors in July. Overall, Lycos is the No. 4 Web portal, behind Yahoo!, MSN and AOL.com, in terms of unique visitors.

The glitch was a major headache for Pete Glasser, a Pittsburgh litigation consultant who said he had been told several times by the company that the problem would soon be fixed.

"I probably have 100 business e-mails and I have no idea which customers need urgent attention," he said.

Links To Anti-Spam Resources

Resources exist to help companies and individuals fight spam. Here's a list of anti-spam organizations and groups:

www.cauce.org - CAUCE, Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial Email

www.irtf.org/charters/asrg.html - The Internet Research Task Force's Anti-Spam Research Group

www.spamcon.org - A public benefit corporation that advocates for the mitigation of spam

www.spamhaus.org - Anti-spam organization that tracks spammers

www.abuse.net/spamtools.html - Lists anti-spam tools

www.spamconference.org - MIT's annual anti-spam conference

directory.google.com/Top/Computers/Internet/Abuse/Spam/Blacklists - Google's blacklist directory

www.spamfaq.net - A useful spam FAQ with links to other spam FAQs

www.spamarchive.org - A database of known spam to be used for testing, developing, and benchmarking anti-spam tools.

www.howtofightspam.com - Lists anti-spam resources

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